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17 June 2004

[Dear Kara]

**MEETING BETWEEN THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE AND
SENIOR BRITISH MILITARY REPRESENTATIVE – IRAQ: 14 JUNE 2004**

The Secretary of State met with Lieutenant General J McColl, SBMR-I, during his visit to Basrah on 14 June 2004. In attendance was Paula Hothersall, POLAD, and Arfan Choudhry, Iraq (Sec)1.

McColl opened the meeting by highlighting recent developments in relation to Security Sector Reform. The strategic review, as proposed by Major General Houghton (ACDS(Ops)) would provide an overarching structure for the various strands of Iraqi security forces. The US Office of Security Transformation is currently developing this work with a team from the UK MOD. The Secretary of State commented that following his meeting with the previous Iraqi Defence Minister (Dr Ali Allawi) it would be important to ensure that the Iraqi MOD was engaged in the process and felt that it would have some degree of final ownership. McColl confirmed that two Iraqi staff officers were involved but the item was essentially a US lead. On the issue of the security relationship and partnership with the Iraqis, the Secretary of State asked for a summary of points that he could usefully raise with Rumsfeld, which should include outstanding CPA and SOFA issues.

McColl gave an overview on security. The latest actions against Muqtada al Sadr (MAS) and his militia in Karbala and Najaf were going well as a result of effective, sensitive and targetted US operations.

Turning to Fallujah, McColl felt that the policy of containment of FREs, loyalists and possibly Al Zarqawi seemed to be working; the Fallujah Brigade had however experienced some casualties. There is considerable pressure on the Fallujah Brigade to deliver results and Prime Minister Allawi is keen to build on

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PS/Foreign Secretary

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his programmes of Sunni outreach and engagement with local tribes, which could in turn be applied to Fallujah. The Secretary of State commented that presumably there was an Iraqi sense that they themselves must sort out Fallujah and Zarqawi.

In Baghdad, the assassination of senior Iraqi Government officials combined with the attacks on infrastructure (particularly electricity and oil facilities) and attacks on Iraqi Security Forces have all caused concern. McColl confirmed that action was in hand to protect key officials and to try and prevent attacks on infrastructure. He expected that there would be short term difficulties but that in the longer term the prospect of the National Assembly in July 04, and the promised elections, both presented good reasons to be optimistic. Furthermore, McColl's impression was that Iraqi Security Forces were becoming increasingly effective.

The Secretary of State asked whether it would be feasible to hold elections now; McColl answered that he felt that it would be possible but the significant practical difficulties it would pose would be serious. However, by 30 December the Security Forces would be in place to patrol the polling stations. Combined with the promised \$18.4Bn assigned by the PMO for economic development this added to the sense of optimism. McColl did however make the point that the challenge of protecting around 30,000 polling stations should not be underestimated. That said, the economy required the PMO funding to be in place and it was still not clear when the funds would actually arrive.

7. Moving on to the question of whether the HQ ARRC and a further brigade should be deployed to Iraq, the Secretary of State commented that the basic issue was whether we should go outside of the current UK area of operations. McColl's view was that the UK should deploy HQ ARRC and a further brigade to support the US who in his view were "suffering". General Abizaid had commented recently that he had already asked for HQ ARRC six times. The Secretary of State expressed some surprise at this; there had been no official approaches made to him on HQ ARRC (**this was borne out in SofS's conversation with Rumsfeld on 15 June. Rumsfeld was going to speak to Abizaid on whether the ARRC was needed**). The Secretary of State asked McColl what difference and benefits additional deployments would give us. McColl's view was that a UK deployment would allow us to conduct operations in MND(CS) from a UK perspective. The risk was that with the replacement of the current US unit in place (1st Armoured Division) then the potential for a decline in the security situation was very real. McColl stated his view that if we did not deploy additional troops there would be a higher level of risk to troops in Iraq and a further risk to the strategic mission.

8. The Secretary of State asked if McColl felt he was receiving the necessary support and assistance. McColl replied that he was content with his position but that the issue of increasing UK influence on the US was becoming "embarrassing". The positions that the UK held in the various HQs (and hence the influence) was disproportionate to our overall troop deployment and financial contributions. He was very content that the UK voice was heard.

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The Secretary of State commented that the quality and calibre of the Iraqis that he had met had impressed him. There was no doubting their ability but decision making was a new concept to many of them. It would be important to have appropriate structures in place to support them. McColl agreed and commented that the arrival of Negroponte should improve the US/Iraqi relationship – particularly among the Iraqi leadership.

This was a useful scene-setter before the Secretary of State commenced the main part of his visit to Basrah.

I am copying this note to David Quarry (No 10), Moazzam Malik (DfID), Desmond Bowen (Cabinet Office).

[Yours]

M P NAWORYNSKY
Private Secretary

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